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An Address to Our Fellow-Citizens
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R. S. Abbott

AN ADDRESS

TO OUR

FELLOW-CITIZENS

ISSUED BY THE

Quarterly Meeting of FRIENDS,

HELD IN PHILADELPHIA, ELEVENTH MO. 5, 1894.

FRIENDS' BOOK STORE,
No. 304 Arch Street, Philadelphia.

1894.

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Oct. 29, 1937.

At a Quarterly Meeting of Friends held at their Meeting-house on Arch Street, Philadelphia, the fifth day of Eleventh Month, 1894, the following minute was adopted:

"The Committee appointed at our last meeting to consider the propriety of issuing an Address to our fellow citizens in reference to some of the evils existing and on the increase amongst us, report, that upon weightily considering the subject, they believed it would be right to issue such an Address, and they now produced one which was read and approved by this meeting. Under a feeling of love and religious concern, which has begotten a desire that all may be drawn into and preserved in the paths of righteousness, it is referred to the same Committee for publication and distribution."

Taken from the minutes,

EPHRAIM SMITH, *Clerk.*

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To our Fellow-Citizens.

Believing that the Christian church has an office to perform in laboring for the strengthening of its own members, we feel that it has a duty also to the community to encourage all in the line of righteousness, and in that allegiance we owe to Him who has the destinies of peoples in his hands, who when He speaketh it is done, He commandeth and it stands fast.

Among the many blessings with which the citizens of Philadelphia and its vicinity have been favored with, must be enumerated an exemption from the scenes of blood-shed and misery, which, in some other places, have resulted from the spirit of lawlessness and discord that has lately prevailed. This, with other favors, demands our gratitude to the Controller of events, and should incite us to further efforts to raise the standard of commercial integrity, honest municipal government, and right, unselfish dealing between employers and employed. Our

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blessings may also properly raise the inquiry whether we may expect a continuance of them from Him, whose gracious designs towards his children are conditioned upon their obedience to his requirments; or whether there are elements at work among us, which, if unchecked, may cause Him to withdraw his protecting hand, or even visit us with the manifest tokens of his chastening displeasure.

While, therefore, we are animated with the belief that there are in our beloved city, men and women not a few, who "fear God and work righteousness," we are concerned to ask our fellow-citizens generally to examine some of the influences among us, which, we apprehend, are tending powerfully to lead into those paths of error which terminate in the chambers of death.

Is not the growth of those evil habits and practices which largely swell the ranks of the juvenile offenders, of whom the courts are obliged to take cognizance, chiefly due to a lack of restraint and correct example on the part of parents? These, as the Divinely appointed guardians and instructors of youth, are charged with duties and responsibilities which cannot be evaded, or devolved upon others; and upon the right discharge of which, not only the happiness of the family itself, but of the whole

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community depends. Has not the continued neglect of many parents to train up their children in piety and virtue, been followed by a large increase among us of the irreligious and libertine; and favored the growth of those elements, which in other communities have produced the fruits of violence and anarchy? To mothers especially is committed the care of the young; and they should seek Divine help to cherish in their children all right dispositions; to train them in morality and religion, and to restrain them from evil companionship and practices.

As the only effectual barrier against the inroads of wickedness is the religion of Jesus Christ operating upon the heart, we have looked with painful concern upon the growing disposition to lessen the observance of the First day of the week as a day of rest and religious retirement, and the performance of that puplic worship of the Almighty, which is so appropriate from us as his dependent creatures.

This disposition has been particularly fostered by the great increase, lately observable, in the number, size and circulation of the newspapers published to be read on this day. It is our conviction that by the perusal of these papers many lose that relish for religious thoughtfulness

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which is essential to a growth in the saving knowledge of God and of his Son, Jesus Christ, which has been declared by the Redeemer of men, to be life eternal; and we earnestly ask our fellow-citizens conscientiously to avoid reading these papers upon the day of rest.

We have viewed with much apprehension the great increase of places of amusement, many of which appear to be of very questionable character. We have also observed with sorrow the large number of young persons and others who crowd the entrances to the theatres. The placards which are permitted by the city to be displayed upon the sidewalks, sufficiently demonstrate the demoralizing character of many of the representations which are to be witnessed in the theatres, and indicate that a sacrifice, not only of time and money, but of the interests of the immortal soul, is the cost of frequenting them.

Some may occasionally visit the theatre without due thought as to its immoral and irreligious influences, but a religious journal of our country has recently said, "When the purity of women and of families furnishes fun for an evening, it is evident that something is wrong with the audience quite as much as with the stage. Is it impossible to have entertainment

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without indecency? Is there no wit left save that which plays around forbidden subjects? Are amusement seekers attracted only by the salacious and the vulgar?"

It is familiar to all that the profession of an actor is exceedingly dangerous to morals, and is it right to encourage an occupation so full of moral peril, and so little worthy of the dignity of an immortal being? As to the too common attenders of theatres a writer of our country and time has said: "Husbands who have lost all love for home go there; spendthrifts go there; lost men and lost women go there; the off-scouring of all flesh pour through the doors. I have stood by the entrance of theatres many and many a time, as people were coming out at night, and watched, so that I know what I say." With such testimony from those who are acquainted with the character of the theatre, who can doubt the injury it is inflicting upon the welfare and morals of the community, and we can but earnestly desire the preservation of those, who have not yet been contaminated by its polluting influences.

Signal instances of Divine judgments upon the theatre have at times been recorded, and have we not witnessed lately in our own city, the horrible ending of an exhibition of impious and

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diabolical scenes, which in the sober judgment of many of our fellow citizens, plainly manifested the disapprobation of the Most High? From early times very many earnest Christians and whole denominations have protested against theatre-going, as hostile to a true Christian life; and there is no reason to believe the causes for such a protest have disappeared.

With appreciation of the efforts that have been made to lessen the evils of intemperance, we yet desire to press upon all thoughtful citizens a sense of their responsibility for the traffic in intoxicating drinks countenanced by our laws. Intemperance is the fruitful parent of misery and vice, and the traffic in intoxicants is a source of moral degradation, of crime, poverty and death. Especially should all professing Christians weightily consider their duty towards the suppression of this widespread, and most potent enemy to the general welfare. We are fully persuaded that a taste for liquor is often stimulated by the use of tobacco, especially in the young.

While thus concerned to point out some of the more flagrant evils which afflict the community, we are not unmindful of those which flow from the avaricious grasping after wealth, too often without regard for the rights and interests of

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others; nor of the sad consequences to public morals that flow from the easy and frequent severance of the marriage covenant by forms of law; and the soul desolating effects of licentiousness. It is sometimes assumed that vice and immorality must exist, and that allowance must be made for them in the government of cities. This we believe to be a mistake fraught with great evil. The laws should frown upon vice and immorality, not in the interests of the religious and orderly portion of the citizens only, but in that of those most tempted to vicious courses; who may be greatly restrained from them if the opportunities for them are removed.

"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people," and those in authority should bear in mind that it is incumbent upon them not only to inflict punishments upon the evil-doer, but also rightly to discourage that which is of evil tendency; so that a blessing may attend their care and religious concern for the welfare of the people.

We desire to invite attention to a movement, as yet restricted in extent, which tends, we believe, insidiously and powerfully to turn men's minds away from the peaceable nature of Christ's kingdom, by fostering the spirit of war. We allude to the formation of "Boys' Brigades"

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by some religious organizations and schools, in which training belonging to a military system is to a greater or less degree recommended and enforced. By this a strong bias is given to the youthful mind towards the glittering, yet in the end, awful occupation of a destroyer of his fellow-men.

Does not the sanction thus given by the professing church greatly lower, if it does not entirely contradict the profession which it may make of being composed of followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, who said, "My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight." "The Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

For reasons similar to those already stated, we earnestly deprecate the introduction of military drill into the public schools. These schools are sustained by a common taxation of all citizens, and the introduction into them of compulsory military exercises will be oppressive to tender consciences. The defence of our nation is in justice and righteousness; not in munitions of war.

While thus expressing our convictions in relation to some of the evils that threaten us as a community, we desire to strengthen and en-

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courage the right-minded and upright in their several stations and spheres of usefulness; who are exercised for the maintenance and spread of truth and righteousness in our city, and to stem the current of iniquity. As it is only by the grace of God that men can be enlightened and enabled to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world, we would that those who have the welfare of others at heart may persuade men to seek for and keep under the influence of this Divine Grace, which purifies from all iniquity. Those who do so will know the Divine blessing to keep them in the peaceable spirit of Jesus, showing forth its fruits in a life of godliness.

We believe that the Lord, whose tender mercies are over all his works, is watching over this city and community for good; and although of "purer eyes than to behold evil," yet that He will bless those who turn unto Him with full purpose of heart, and who are earnestly endeavoring to obey Him.

In conclusion, we would recall the language of that eminent minister of the Gospel, and wise legislator, William Penn, who in the yearnings of his soul over the city he had founded, exclaimed: "Oh that thou mayst be kept from the evil that would overwhelm thee; that, faith-

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ful to the God of thy mercies, in the life of righteousness, thou mayest be preserved to the end. My soul prays to God, that thou mayest stand in the day of trial, that thy children may be blest of the Lord; and thy people saved by his power."

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